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ABSTRACT

John Searle's treatment of declarations in his (1976) classification of speech acts is examined. Some acts that are classified as declarations by that theorist, especially certain ones relating to religious rituals and literary usage, do not fit the definition of that class and should be reclassified, either in another one of Searle's classes (representatives) or in a new class (spells). The declarations and representatives classes are studied and compared, and the classification of spells is introduced. The spells class provides distinctions necessary to the understanding of some important issues in European history and to the analysis of certain literary works. The speech acts in question include uses of "confess, excommunicate, and forgive." (MSE)

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'A WHOLLY BREATH-TAKING CHANGE OF SUBSTANCE EFFECTED BY A FORM OF WORDS': AN ANATOMY OF SECULAR, DOCTRINAL AND SUPERNATURAL ILLOCUTIONARY ACTS.

1. INTRODUCTION.

In this paper I will examine the class of Declarations in Searle's (1976) system for classification of illocutionary acts. In particular, I will argue that some of the acts which Searle includes in this class do not really fit the definition of the class but have to be reclassified, some as Representatives within Searle's classification system, others as Spells, a new class of illocutionary acts which I find it necessary to introduce. I will endeavour to justify the introduction of this class by showing that it is needed for a correct analysis of certain uses of language in religious rituals as well as in certain types of literature. I will conclude by examining a few illocutionary acts in some detail, acts which were either ignored or incorrectly analysed by Searle.

2. DECLARATIONS AND REPRESENTATIVES.

Searle's (1976:8) criticism of Austin's system for classification of illocutionary acts on the grounds of 'a great deal of heterogeneity within some of the categories' is equally applicable to his own class of Declarations. According to Searle (1976:15, 20), (1) - (6) are examples of Declarations.

(1) I now pronounce you man and wife.
(2) I declare the meeting adjourned.
(3) I resign.
(4) I excommunicate you.
(5) You're fired.
(6) Let there be light. (uttered by God)

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These examples are all classified by Searle as Declarations because they 'bring about some alternation in the status or condition of the referred-to object or objects solely by virtue of the fact that the declaration has been successfully performed' (1976:14). Additional examples of the same type are (7) - (9):

(7) I divorce you. (uttered by a Moslem)

(8) This is my body. (i.e. the body of Christ; uttered by a priest consecrating the Host)

(9) The paper is now open for discussion. (uttered by a chairman at a linguistics conference)

However, a brief consideration of the nature of Declarations will show that not all of the examples given above will pass muster as members of this class. A Declaration is an illocutionary act, the successful performance of which brings about a transition (t) from one state of affairs (s_1) to another (s_2). For example, the utterance of (3) as a successful Declaration brings about a transition from the state of employment to the state of non-employment; similarly, (7), used as a successful Declaration, brings about a transition from the state of being married to the state of not being married. But, as Searle points out (1976:14), the typical Declaration is performed within the framework of an extralinguistic (social) institution, such as the Church, the Law, a capitalist employment system, etc. This means that s_1 and s_2 have the status of facts only within the framework of the relevant institution; they are, in other words, institutional facts, as opposed to brute facts (Searle 1969:53-4). Someone who does not acknowledge the existence of the institution will not recognise them as facts.

The successful performance of a Declaration thus changes one institutional fact into a different institutional fact. It is not possible to use a Declaration for alchemical purposes to change the brute fact of lead into the brute fact of gold. Note that even the acts of naming, defining, etc., which according to Searle (1976:14-15) require no extralinguistic institutions, are still concerned with institutional facts: naming does not change brute facts in the real world, as Juliet realised (10).

(10) What's in a name? That which we call a rose
By any other name would smell as sweet. (*Romeo and Juliet* II.ii.43-4; Shakespeare 1980:129)

We can recognise two different expression types used in utterances for the performance of Declarations. In the first type there is a verb which in its meaning encapsulates both s_1 and s_2, as well as the transition between them, such as *excommunicate*, *divorce*, or *resign*. In the second type the verb, e.g. *pronounce* or *declare*, denotes only the act of performing the Declaration, which brings about the transition; s_2 is referred to by the complement(s) of the verb, as in (1) and (2).

Examples like (5), (8), and (9), however, should be analysed not as Declarations, but as Representatives referring to the state of affairs following the transition (s_2). Nevertheless, (5) can be used to bring about a transition from the state of employment to the state of non-employment, just like (3). I would suggest that this pragmatic function of the Representative arises as a conversational implicature: in a situation where s_1 has so far been current, where the speaker is recognised as being in a position to bring about the transition from s_1 to s_2, and where all other conditions governing this particular transition are satisfied, a hearer must recognise the transition as taking place in order to make his interpretation of the utterance (in which the speaker, after all, claims that s_2 is the current state of affairs) consistent with his expectation that the speaker observes Grice's first maxim in the category of Quality ('Do not say what you believe to be false'; Grice 1975:46).

The approach I suggest here would account for the different possible functions of utterances of this type. If (9) is uttered by the chairman at a linguistics conference after a speaker has just finished the presentation of his paper, then the hearers will immediately regard it as bringing about a transition to the state of affairs referred to in the utterance, since the chairman is the right person to bring about the transition, the moment is right, etc. In a situation like this, the Declaration implicature is one that does not have to be calculated by the hearers - to use Morgan's term (1978:274), it is short-circuited.

If, on the other hand, Professor A a few seconds later whispers (9) to Professor B, who has been nodding for the last couple of minutes, then the utterance will function only as a Representative with no additional Declaration implicature, since Professor B knows that Professor A, not being the chairman of the session, is not in a position to bring about the transition: Professor B has to accept the fact that the moment of transition has gone by, unheeded by him.

Representatives with short-circuited Declaration implicatures are used

by children from an early age in games of make-believe, as in (11), where *this* refers to the sofa that speaker and addressee are sitting on.

(11) This is the train to Stockholm.

The utterance will be regarded as functioning pragmatically as a Declaration only by someone who accepts the extralinguistic institution of the game; the institutional fact that is changed is the participants´ categorisation of the referent of *this*. To anyone who does not enter into the spirit of the game, (11) will just be an untrue Representative.

The same kind of exploitation of Representatives can be found in the performance of plays; (12), from *Twelfth Night*, is a good example of this.

(12) Viola: - What country, friends, is this?
Captain: This is Illyria, lady. (I.ii.1-2; Shakespeare 1975:8)

On one level - in the fictional discourse between the characters in the play - the captain´s answer to Viola´s question is a Representative and no more. On another level, however - in the communication between actors and audience - the Representative carries a Declaration implicature. Within the framework of the social institution of the theatre performance this implicature makes the audience accept the identification of the stage with Illyria; it can thus be used instead of elaborate stage property, as pointed out by Frykman and Kjellmer (1969:56).

Example (8), uttered by a priest with reference to the bread used for the Eucharist, can be regarded as an example of the same type. By anyone who does not believe in the doctrine of transubstantiation the utterance will be seen as not changing the brute fact of `breadness´, but only the institutional fact of the congregation´s categorisation of the referent of *this*: instead of categorising it as `bread´ (although they know that it still is bread, just like the sofa in (11) is a sofa and the stage in (12) is a stage), they will categorise it as `the body of Christ´. In other words, the bread will be regarded as a SYMBOL of the body of Christ; this was actually the position taken by Zwingli, the Swiss reformer (Koch and Munk Plum 1943:286). For a Catholic, who believes in the doctrine of transubstantiation (Koch and Munk Plum 1943:286), the utterance will carry a different implicature: the change will be seen as one of brute facts (changing the substance of the bread, although not its appearance), and

the utterance will function as a Spell (see section 3 below).

The analysis proposed here brings out the correspondence between syntactic form and illocutionary act more clearly than does Searle's. Thus (5), (8), (9), (11), and (12) are always analysed as Representatives, regardless when and by whom they are uttered; only if the circumstances are right will the Declaration function arise as a conversational implicature.

3. SPELLS.

As was suggested in section 2 above, it is necessary to make a distinction between such illocutionary acts as bring about a change in institutional facts, Declarations, and such illocutionary acts as bring about a change in brute facts, Spells. To a sceptical mind it may seem objectionable to treat Spells as a reality, but it cannot be denied that they play a vital role in certain religious contexts. The importance attached to them throughout the centuries, by adherents as well as by opponents, is borne out by the persecution of heretics and the many wars fought over such matters as the doctrine of transubstantiation. A recognition of Declarations and Spells as different classes of illocutionary acts will thus be essential to an understanding of some important issues in European history; it will also provide a useful tool for the analysis of certain works of literature, as will be shown below.

Many utterances which function situationally as Spells are strictly speaking Representatives which carry a Spell implicature if the circumstances are right; in this respect Spells are no different from Declarations. In this section only the function of the utterances will be taken into account, since the distinction between Spells and Representatives with Spell function is not relevant to a discussion of the differences between Spells and Declarations. In a complete analysis of Spells that distinction will have to taken into account, of course.

As was pointed out above, example (8) is seen as functioning as a Spell in the Catholic Church. According to the doctrine of transubstantiation, as formulated by Radbertus Paschasius (d. 865), `the substance of the Bread and Wine is efficaciously changed interiorly into the Flesh and Blood of Christ' (*Enc. Brit.* 22.416). Only the outward appearance of bread and wine remain, partly not to frighten the worshippers, partly to test their faith (Koch and Munk Plum 1943:285). According to the author of the *Ancrene Riwle* the change of substance is real, but the appearance of bread is retained since the eyes of the communicants could not endure the

sight of the Lord: `... eueriche deie he cumeð forð. ⁊ scheaweð him to ou flesliche ⁊ licamliche iðe messe. biwrien þauh in oðres like⁊ under breades heouwe. vor in his owune heowe. vre eien ne muhten nout ðe brihte sihðe⁊ iþo-lien.' (Cotton MS. Nero A.xiv f. 70^{v}; Day 1952:117/21-4). The change is thus seen as one of brute facts, and not of institutional facts: the utterance functions as a Spell.

It must be noted here that the classification of (8) depends on the particular religious doctrine one adheres to: to a Catholic it is a Spell, to a Protestant, on the other hand, it is a Declaration. I will therefore use the term Doctrinal Spell (DoS) to refer to this type of Spell.

The ambivalence in the status of (8) plays a central part in some of George Mackay Brown´s works. In the short story *A Treading of Grapes* he contrasts the Catholic position, as expressed in a sermon on the wedding at Cana preached by Father Halcrow, a 16th-century priest in Stromness (13), with the non-committal Presbyterian attitude, as expressed in a sermon on the same text preached by Father Halcrow´s 18th-century successor, the Rev. Dr. Thomas Fortheringhame (14).

(13) *What wedding?* you ask, *we know of no wedding.* I answer, *the marriage of Christ with His Church. And where will this marriage be?* you ask. *Everywhere,* I answer, *but in particular, lords and princes, in this small kirk beside the sea where you sit. And when is it to be, this wedding?* you ask me. *Always,* I answer, *but in particular within this hour, now, at the very moment when I bow over this bread of your offering, the food, princes and lords, that you have won with such hard toil from the furrows, at once when I utter upon it five words* HIC EST ENIM CORPUS MEUM. Then is Christ the King come once again to his people, as truly as he was present at the marriage in Cana, ... (Brown 1969:74)

(14) `This is my body,´ he said, and then, `This is my blood´ - a most strange and mystifying comparison indeed, that the papists would have us believe to be a literal and real and wholly breath-taking change of substance effected by a form of words. Whatever it means, brethren - and our General Assembly has not and doubtless will not bind you to any infallible conclusions as to the significance of these utterances - whatever it means, it teaches us a terrible reverence for the things we put in our mouths to nourish us, whether it is the laird´s grouse and claret or the limpets that Sam of the Shore eats with cold water out of the well in the lean days of March. (Brown 1969:68-9)

In a different story (*Master Halcrow, Priest*) Father Halcrow is shown to be aware of the difference between the Catholic doctrine and the Protestant point of view at the time of the Scottish reformation:

(15) What might such men do to the Bread of Heaven, seeing that for them now it was no longer the Body of Our Lord but mortal bread over which five invalid words had been uttered? (Brown 1967:133)

Two other Spells (according to Catholic doctrine) are the consecration of bishops and the ordination of priests: `Consecration ... effects an intimate transformation in the essence of the object, and ... is permanent and can be neither revoked nor repeated.´ (*Enc. Brit.* 6.376); `Roman Catholic theology accounts ordination a sacrament essential to the church and the bestowal of an unrepeatable, indelible character upon the persons ordained.´ (*Enc. Brit.* 16.869). In the eyes of the Scottish reformers, on the other hand, consecration and ordination were on a par with the appointment of secretaries and sheriffs - in other words, they were Declarations, which only affected institutional facts and thus could be revoked. It is the clash between these points of view that leaves Father Halcrow perplexed; the bishop, for his part, is enough of a pragmatist to transfer his allegiance to the new church:

(16) `The priesthood abolished?´ I said. `This is droll talk. I was told at the time of my first becoming a priest that I was a priest forever in the stream of the apostolic succession, and can any men of the temporality take this title from me? This was never told me before, your grace, either by you or by your predecessor that ordained me, may God keep his soul in peace.´

The bishop´s face was a total flush from brow to chin. `You must not call me "your grace" any more,´ he said in a low voice. `I am no more a bishop. Things are thus in Scotland now. We cannot alter it. They are powerful and angry men that rule in the land.´

There was silence between us then for a little while.

....

I then asked the bishop what he himself would do, now that the wolf was in the sheepfold and the ravening had begun.

`I am not brave enough to be a martyr,´ he said curtly. `Tell me, Master Halcrow, what will you do?´

I said that I did not know. Here I was and here like enough I would sit until God´s will in the matter was made plain.

(Brown 1967:128-9)

A second category of Spells, apart from the doctrinal ones discussed above, may be termed Supernatural Spells (SuS). A good example is (6) above, about which Searle says (1976:15), `When God says "Let there be light" that is a declaration.´ But the darkness preceding, and the light following, God´s utterance can only be regarded as brute facts, and not as institutional facts. Thus the utterance functions as a Spell, and not as a Declaration.

Spells of this kind abound in the literary genre known as Fantasy, in works such as Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, Donaldson's Thomas Covenant trilogy, and LeGuin's Earthsea trilogy, to mention but a few of the best known. In such works the authors depict worlds in which physical laws can be suspended and manipulated at will by specially gifted men and women (wizards, witches, etc.); speech acts can there bring about indisputable changes of brute facts. A few examples from *The Lord of the Rings* and *A Wizard of Earthsea* will suffice to illustrate this kind of Spell.

(17) He raised his hand, and spoke slowly in a clear cold voice. `Saruman, your staff is broken.' There was a crack, and the staff split asunder in Saruman's hand, and the head of it fell down at Gandalf's feet. (Tolkien 1968:607)

(18) The young dragon made no answer. ... Straight at Ged in the small rocking boat he came, opening his long, toothed jaws as he slid down arrowy from the air: so that all that Ged had to do was bind his wings and limbs stiff with one sharp spell and send him thus hurtling aside into the sea like a stone falling. And the grey sea closed over him. (LeGuin 1977:87)

(19) `... I am the Lord of the Stone, and this I do to the disloyal wife: *Ekavroe ai oelwantar* -' It was a spell of Changing, and Benderesk's long hands were raised to shape the cowering woman into some hideous thing, swine or dog or drivelling hag. Ged stepped forward and struck the lord's hands down with his own, saying as he did so only one short word. And though he had no staff, and stood on alien ground and evil ground, the domain of a dark power, yet his will prevailed. Benderesk stood still, his clouded eyes fixed hateful and unseeing upon Serret.

....

Seizing Ged's hand Serret ran with him through the passages and halls, down the long twisted stairs. They came out into the courtyard where a last silvery daylight still hung above the soiled, trodden snow. Three of the castle-servants barred their way, sullen and questioning, as if they had been suspecting some plot of these two against their master. `It grows dark, Lady,' one said, and another, `You cannot ride out now.'

`Out of my way, filth!' Serret cried, and spoke in the sibilant Osskilian speech. The men fell back from her and crouched down on the ground, writhing, and one of them cried aloud.

....

She tugged at his hand, yet he hesitated. `What spell did you set on them?'

`I ran hot lead in the marrow of their bones, they will die of it. Quick, I tell you he will loose the Servants of the Stone, and I cannot find the gate - there is a great charm set on it. Quick!'

....

`Change yourself! Change yourself, they are coming!' Serret shrieked, seizing his arm and pointing to the tower that stood behind them like a tall white tooth in the dusk. From slit windows near its base dark creatures were creeping forth, flapping long wings, slowly beating and circling up over the wall towards Ged and Serret where they stood on the hillside, unprotected. ...

Anger welled up in Ged's heart, a hot rage against all the cruel

> deathly things that tricked him, trapped him, hunted him down. `Change yourself!´ Serret screamed at him, and she with a quick-gasped spell shrank into a grey gull, and flew. But Ged stooped and plucked a blade of wild grass that poked up dry and frail out of the snow where the otak had lain dead. This blade he held up, and as he spoke aloud to it in the True Speech it lengthened, and thickened, and when he was done he held a great staff, a wizard´s staff, in his hand. (LeGuin 1977:120-2)

Spell upon Spell in rapid succession - these passages certainly make lively reading (if you care for that type of literature), but they also show clearly the difference between Doctrinal and Supernatural Spells. In Middle-earth and in Earthsea the effects of the utterances are not a matter of belief or opinion: Saruman´s staff actually breaks in two, the dragon actually falls into the sea, the servants actually die of the hot lead in the marrow of their bones, the witch actually turns into a gull and the blade of grass into a great staff.

It should be obvious by now that an extension of speech act theory to the analysis of the language of religious rituals and the magical use of speech in works of Fantasy requires the recognition of Spells as a separate class of illocutionary acts, distinct from Declarations. In the following section a few illocutionary acts will be discussed in the light of this distinction.

4. THREE ACTS ANATOMISED.

4.1. Confess.

Confess is a Representative: the speaker represents her/himself as having done something which (s)he should not have done. What the speaker has done is something shameful, immoral, illegal, or, in religious confession, a sin. As is the case with other Representatives, *confess* does not require that the speaker should have some special status: anyone can confess. The sincerity condition of Representatives - belief in the truth of the asserted proposition - leads to the possibility of false confession, something which spiritual guidebooks such as the *Ancrene Riwle* warn against: `Schrift ouh forte beon soð. ne lih þu nout oþi sulf. vor ase seint austin seið. Qui causa humilitatis men-titur. fit quod prius ipse non fuit. id est peccator. þe þet liheð on him sulf þuruh to muchel edmodnesse. he is i maked sunful? þauh he er nere.´ (Cotton MS. Nero A.xiv f. 92; Day 1952:152/16-20). In other words, an exaggerated account of your

sins is just as bad as an incomplete account.

The illocutionary act *confess* can be represented formally as

$$\vdash B(S \text{ has done } A;\ A \text{ is a sin}).$$

4.2. Excommunicate.

Excommunicate is correctly classified by Searle as a Declaration, but he errs in his account of the resulting state of affairs (s_2). Example (4) is analysed by Searle (1976:21) as 'I declare + Your membership in the church is terminated'. As a matter of fact, excommunication 'is defined by canon law as "a censure by which someone is excluded from the communion of the faithful" but not from membership in the church as such.' (*Enc. Brit.* 8.948).

The character of Declaration is apparent in several ways:

a) the act takes place in a special non-linguistic framework: only members of the Catholic Church can be excommunicated;

b) the act can be successfully performed only by a specially appointed speaker;

c) unlike Spells, such as the ordination of priests and the consecration of bishops, the act can be revoked: 'If an excommunicated person confesses his sin and undergoes penance for it, he is absolved' (*Enc. Brit.* 8.949), i.e. he is readmitted to the communion of the faithful.

The illocutionary act *excommunicate* can be represented formally as

$$D\Downarrow\varnothing(s_2: H \text{ is excluded from the communion of the faithful}).$$

4.3. Forgive.

Forgive is, curiously enough, not mentioned at all by Searle. Like *warn*, which can be either a Representative or a Directive (Searle 1976:22), and *swear*, which can be either a Representative or a Commissive (Searle 1976: 7, 10), *forgive* can be shown to belong to different classes of illocutionary acts. A primary distinction can be made between religious forgiving (*forgive*$_{rel}$), which is synonymous with *absolve* (20 a-d), and secular forgiving (*forgive*$_{sec}$), as in (21 a-b).

(20) a. I forgive you all your sins. (Anglican/Lutheran; *Enc. Brit.* 1.51)

b. I forgive thee thy sins in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost. Amen. Go in peace. (Early Lutheran; *Enc. Brit.* 6.291)

c. I absolve thee from thy sins in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost. (Roman Catholic; *Enc. Brit.* 1.51)

d. I absolve thee from all thy sins, In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen. (Anglican; *The Book of Common Prayer* 1842, The order for the Visitation of the Sick)

(21) a. I lent you that £2.50 a month ago; I forgive you the 50p, but I want my £2 back.

b. 'You're too impatient. Let's just be engaged for a few months.'
...
'No. That's not enough. You know it too, but I forgive you because you don't realise what it means to me. We must be married, Mollie.' (LOB P13 99; for further information, see Johansson 1978)

Religious forgiving and absolution release the sinner from the guilt of sin, i.e. bring about a transition from the state of sinfulness (s_1) to the state of freedom from sin (s_2). By the believer these acts are seen as Doctrinal Spells, since they affect not only the sinner's relations with the Church (institutional facts), but also his relations with God (brute facts), according to Math. xviii.18; 'Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.' Like other Doctrinal Spells, such as ordination and consecration, the acts of religious forgiving and absolution are irrevocable; although the absolved sinner can commit new sins and thus again enter into the the state of sinfulness, he can never again be made guilty of the particular sins he has been absolved from. A non-believer, by contrast, will regard *forgive*$_{rel}$ and *absolve* as Declarations, which affect only institutional facts, viz. the sinner's relations with the Church.

Forgive$_{sec}$ can be either a Declaration or a Commissive: if I forgive someone's debt to me, as in (21 a), I perform an illocutionary act which cancels the debt, i.e. a Declaration. If, on the other hand, I forgive someone for her/his reprehensible conduct, as in (21 b), the act is a Commissive: I commit myself to harbouring no further resentment for what (s)he has done. In its use as a Commissive, secular forgiving is as prone to insincerity as is promising: if I say 'I forgive you' but nevertheless do not intend to bury my resentment, then I am being insincere. Non-fulfilment, one of Austin's (1975:18) infelicities, is also possible: if I am sincere at the time I perform the act of forgiving but later on

resurrect my resentment, then the act suffers from non-fulfilment.

The different kinds of forgiving can be represented formally thus:

$forgive_{rel}$: D$\Downarrow\emptyset$(s_2: H is free from the guilt of sin)
or DoS$\Downarrow\emptyset$(s_2: H is free from the guilt of sin)

$forgive_{sec}$: D$\Downarrow\emptyset$(s_2: H's debt to S is cancelled)
or C$\uparrow$I(S will not resent past act A done by H).

5. CONCLUSION.

I have argued in this paper for a reclassification of some acts in Searle's class of Declarations as well as for the introduction of a new class of illocutionary acts, viz. Spells. As figure 1 shows, four different types of overlap are possible between the classes of Declarations, Representatives, and Spells:

1. Illocutionary acts which are either Declarations or Doctrinal Spells, such as (20 a-d);
2. Representatives with D/DoS function, such as (8);
3. Representatives with D function, such as (9);
4. Representatives with SuS function, such as (17).

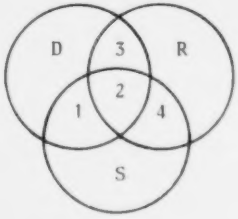

Figure 1. The relationship between Declarations, Representatives, and Spells.

It is my contention that only if we recognise these three classes of illocutionary acts, and the interrelations between them, can we use speech act theory to make an adequate analysis of liturgical language and the use of language in works of Fantasy.

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